

In 1982, the Republic of Malaysia contracted to purchase 52 surplus U.S. Navy *Skyhawks* for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF). Mostly A-4Cs and A-4Ls resurrected from the Arizona desert "bone yard," the Malaysian *Skyhawks* were "re-manufactured" by the Grumman Aircraft Corporation rework facility in St. Augustine, Florida, under a \$120 million contract.

The reworked Cs and Ls were designated A-4PTM (Peculiar To Malaysia). The contract called for 40 of the aircraft to be delivered to Malaysia in operational status, while the remaining 12 were to be "hangar queens" for spare parts cannibalization. Six of the 40 operational birds were rebuilt in trainer configuration (TA-4PTM) using kits assembled from available McDonnell-Douglas TA-4 parts.

PTM modifications included installation of drag-chutes for short field operations, new weapons system, improved avionics, and unique "bulging" canopies for better air-to-ground visibility. "Buddy stores" (aerial fueling units) were part of the buy. The first A-4PTM flew in April 1984 and, shortly thereafter, ten Malaysian officers began training in Florida as RMAF *Skyhawk* instructor pilots.



The Malaysia Skyhawks were reworked A-4C/Ls. The "humpback" configuration, familiar in the F and late E models, was part of the rework, but the PTMs were delivered without radar. Note drag chute housing aft of tailhook. (Photo courtesy of G.F. Harris)

Delivery of the Malaysian *Skyhawks* by American pilots began in December 1984 and was completed on schedule in 1986. The delivery entailed a circuitous and diplomatically complex flight profile. From

Florida to Kuantan, Malaysia, the A-4PTMs were flown on an 11,000 mile track with fueling stops at Griffiss AFB in New York state; Goose Bay, Labrador; Sondrestrom, Greenland; Keflavik, Iceland; Bentwaters, England; Sigonella, Sicily; Cairo, Egypt; Doha, Qatar; and Bombay and Calcutta, India.



Three experienced Skyhawk drivers, Mark Perrault (second from left), "Deke" Bordone (center), and "Zonker" Harris (second from right) trained the first Malaysian instructor pilots in the States. Harris later spent 26 months in Malaysia training more RMAF pilots. The specially configured bulging canopy on the A-4PTM — for improved air-ground visibility — is evident in the aircraft at right. (Photo courtesy of G.F. Harris)

To conduct the flight training portion of the RMAF contract, Grumman hired TEAM (Training Engineering Aviation Management), a corporation headed by retired Navy Captain "Deke" Bordone. Himself an experienced Scooter driver and former CO of USS *F.D. Roosevelt* (CVA-42), Bordone brought in a couple of other well

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qualified *Skyhawk* pilots to assist in the flight training task — retired CAPT Mark Perrault, a former Blue Angel, and Gordon "Zonker" Harris (CDR, USNR), a former VT-7 (Meridian, MS) A-4 flight instructor.

Zonker Harris was later selected to represent Grumman as the company's Resident Flight Consultant in Malaysia. The Malaysian *Skyhawk* assets were divided between two squadrons and Harris spent 26 months in Southeast Asia as a "civilian" Scooter jock involved in the training of additional RMAF pilots. Noting that Malaysian flight rules were a bit less stringent than those prescribed in the U.S. air space, Harris described his experience with the RMAF as "the last great flying...a blast!" Among other accomplishments, Zonker acquired unique bragging rights as the first (and only) "white boy" ever to participate in the RMAF fly-over for the Malaysian National Day Parade in Kuala Lumpur.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRES...

(M.D. "Whizzer" White)

Your Board of Directors met at the Hyatt Regency at the DFW airport on Saturday, 18 January, and actively pursued some worthwhile projects. Try this: The A-4 is still operational in the U.S. Navy! Flown by Training Squadron Seven (VT-7), based at Meridian, Mississippi, the "T" version of our little lady is responsible for training one sector in the current crop of student naval aviators. She gets the best from Pensacola, trains 'em, CarQuals 'em, then Wings 'em and sends them off to the Fleet.

What's that got to do with the *Skyhawk Association*? We've informally "adopted" VT-7 for the remainder of the time it operates the *Skyhawk* (best guess is another year or two, until the T-45 is a stand-alone asset), and the Board voted to establish and sponsor a VT-7 "Student of the Month" award. The Skipper of VT-7, CDR. M.E. "Doc" Wilson, and his XO, CDR W.J. "Jethro" Richardson, were contacted and they enthusiastically endorsed the idea. The first award has been ordered and we anticipate it will be presented in February. Whenever possible, we'll have a *Skyhawk Association* representative on deck in Meridian to present the award. We also offered VT-7 the opportunity to use a corner in our Internet web page. If you happen to be in the NAS Meridian area, give Doc Wilson or Jethro Richardson a call (601-679-2153) and drop by to say "Hi!" to our *Skyhawk Association* "adoptees." I've met many of the squadron members, by E-mail and land-line, and you can rest assured that excellence is their standard.

The Board created a Membership Committee to enhance member recruiting and provide a vehicle for closer member contact through establishment of regional "Dets." Lots of possibilities there — local contact for news, recruiting, sea-story-swapping Det luncheons, etc. I've asked "Jeep" Streeper (Supply, NC) to head the committee, which will select its own Det O-in-Cs.

Your Board also met with reps of the Texas Air Command Museum (Grand Prairie, TX), who invited

Association participation in identification of an about-to-be-retired, flyable TA-4 that the Museum can purchase, maintain, and take to air shows. We have the contacts and they have the "wherewithal." Our involvement with the TACM is cost-free and it will result in a good *Skyhawk Association* member recruiting opportunity.

A TV note: By the time you read this, the 14 February *Wings* program (Discovery channel) may already have aired. If so, I hope you had the chance to see it and, if not, be sure to tune in. Program features include USS *Oriskany* (CVA-34), the *Saints* of VA-163 (part of *Oriskany's* Air Wing 16), and the *Skyhawk*. Focus points include the tragic fire that occurred on board *Oriskany* in October 1966, the heavy pilot losses VA-163 incurred in 1967, and a "personal" segment of *Saint* (later Senator) John McCain who became a POW. Ol' Whiz was interviewed for the program but ended up on the cutting floor with most of the rest of you folks. However, at least I got to talk to a real live producer and the main thing is up-front *Scooter* coverage in a popular public program.

It's been more than three years since we formed the *Skyhawk Association*. We've grown from a single page of names on a yellow legal tablet at Tailhook '93 to a roster of almost 400 dues-paying members. Among others, that roster includes presidents of multi-national corporations, former *Skyhawk* mechs, airline pilots, house painters, artists, ski-bums, ski patrollers, dentists, preachers, surgeons, a former CNO, a private investigator, a judge, a noted TV personality, computer enthusiasts and geeks, a one-arm author, a hand full of Aussies "Down Under," and an Apollo mission commander (Charles "Pete" Conrad, Jr. of Apollo XII, who will be featured in an up-coming issue of our Newsletter.) And "newbie" members keep showing up every week. We're organized, stable, and, thanks to Bud Southworth, were even on the Internet! We hope to keep growing and, with your recruiting help, we should easily achieve a spot on the 1,000 member plateau.

What do we do next? Think Infinity & beyond!

A-4s FOREVER!

Bullpup Air-to-Ground Missile

The *Bullpup* missile was born of the Korean War (1950-1953) as an attempt to find an effective air-to-ground stand-off weapon with a more efficient and effective cost-per-kill than was available through delivery of conventional iron bombs. The requirements for the new weapon were that it be simple, reliable, economical, and accurate. The Bureau of Naval Weapons contracted development of the weapon to the Orlando, Florida division of the Martin Company. The result was a pilot-controlled missile that, theoretically, enabled accurate target destruction while the pilot and his aircraft remained in relative safety miles away from the effective anti-aircraft and small arms envelopes in the immediate target area.



Shown in this 1964 photo is an A-4E of VA-55 (CVW-5) carrying a 250-lb. warhead Bullpup-A missile on the starboard outboard wing station. A VFR-only stand-off weapon, the Bullpup was a "fun toy" but was never accorded significant status as an effective addition to the USN air-to-ground weapons arsenal. (Photo courtesy Tailhook Association.)

The first *Bullpup* guided missile, an 11-foot, 570 pound "bomb with wings," was introduced to the fleet on 25 April 1959. The weapon consisted of three parts — the nose section containing the fusing mechanism, a guidance radio receiver, and small directional control fins; the center section containing a 250-lb. warhead; and the aft component which contained a solid state rocket motor that propelled the missile at speeds exceeding Mach 2. Four large stabilizer fins were attached to the aft section. The pilot provided left, right, up, and down radio guidance signals via the trim tab control button which was temporarily re-programmed for missile control. The three missile components, delivered on board carriers separately, were easily assembled and loaded by squadron ordnance personnel.

VA-212, flying the A4D-2 (A-4B) *Skyhawk*, was the first squadron to receive the *Bullpup-A*. Shortly thereafter almost all *Skyhawk* squadrons became *Bullpup* capable.

Although the *Bullpup* met all the design specifications, from the tactical viewpoint it soon became evident that there was a significant "delta" between theory and practice in delivery of the missile to a target. A major draw-back was the optimum delivery technique, a steady 30-degree dive beginning at a 10,000 foot altitude. The technique required that the target and its environs be in VFR conditions, and it taxed the pilot's ability to visually pin-point the target from a significant distance.

Tight operating funds in the early 1960s made *Bullpup* shoots infrequent events, to the detriment of pilot proficiency in weapon delivery. A few of the *Bullpup-A* missiles were employed in combat in the early stages (1965) of the Vietnam War. In the same year, a big brother version — the *Bullpup-B*, with a 500-pound warhead — was fleet-tested but, as far as is known, it never became operational. Pilots believed the *Bullpup* to be a "fun toy" to play with but it never attained respectable status as a tactical combat weapon. Among other limitations, the long, steady flight path required for delivery of the *Bullpup* made the delivering pilot the proverbial "sitting duck" when the Soviet SA-2 "SAM" (Surface-to-Air Missile) was introduced into the Vietnam War in 1965 as an enemy defensive weapon.

*We looked through the photo file
to see what sort of*

DRAMATIC SKYHAWK

shots we could muster. We came up with a few that are fairly representative and will perhaps stir the "been there, done that" remembrances carried around by many of us.

At right is a photo of a 1995 painting by Bob Rasmussen, Executive Director of the National Museum of Naval Aviation at NAS Pensacola. Titled "Headed Downtown" (i.e., an Alfa strike), it is representative of the thousands of times that evolution was repeated during the wartime career of the Scooter. The subject is an A-4C belonging to the *Blue Blasters* of VA-34, being hoisted by

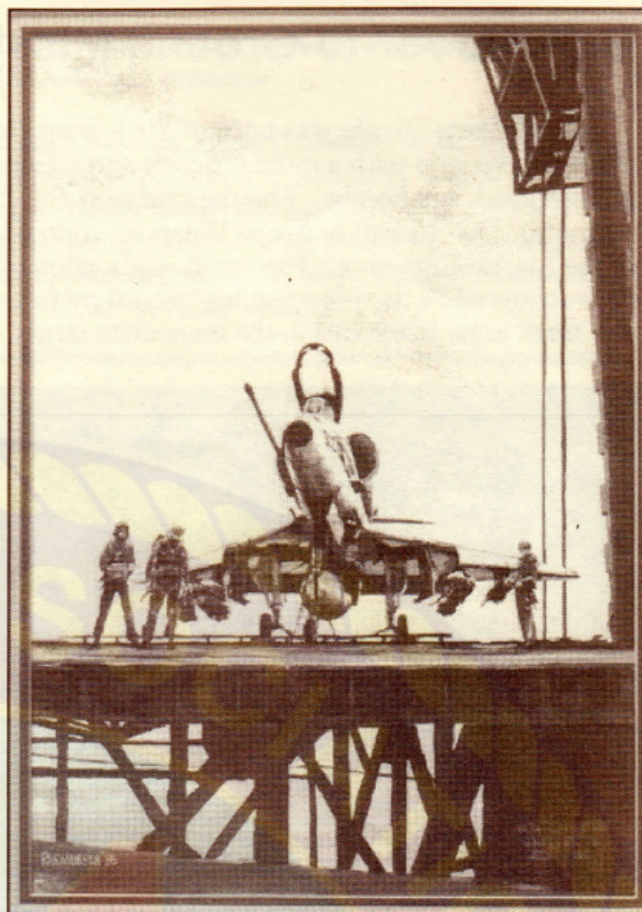


Photo courtesy of Naval Aviation Museum Foundation



U.S. Navy photo

aircraft elevator from hangar deck to flight deck on board USS *Intrepid* (CVS-11) during the ship's May-December 1967 combat deployment. The scene evokes both drama and a bit of nostalgia — the hard working blue-shirt and his never-ending task of man-handling aircraft, the loyal plane captain acting as squire to his pilot-knight, and the *Skyhawk* pilot himself, ready again to place himself at the point of the spear.

 An A-4E belonging the *Roadrunners* of VA-144 is taxied into position on the starboard cat for launch from USS *Kitty Hawk* (CVA-63) during that ship's 1967-68 Vietnam War combat deployment. The day is clear and the deck is steady, but the scene could just as easily be of a pitching deck on a black-ace night. The *Roadrunners* logged six Vietnam War cruises on board four different carriers — *Constellation*, *Ticonderoga*, *Kitty Hawk*, and *Bon Homme Richard*.



U.S. Navy photo

 The steam, the heat, the flight deck's potential danger for the careless or unwary, the tension (no pun intended), the colored "shirts" moving in screaming noise beneath the aircraft, giving silent hand signals of accomplishment — all are captured in this shot of the positioning of a *Skyhawk* for a catapult launch.

The aircraft, belonging to the *Gladiators* of VA-106, is a A-4E retrofitted with the "hump back" avionics package characteristic of the A-4F series.

Assigned to Air Wing 10 on board USS *Intrepid* (CVS-11), the *Gladiators* were deployed in Vietnam War combat operations from June 1968 to February 1969.



U.S. Navy photo

 All tensioned-up (both on the catapult and in the cockpit), salute made and returned, clear deck and green board, the *Skyhawk* is ready to go. Once the cat officer's finger is pointed that-a-way, the pilot has few options except to hang on and hope for a good slug of steam. The aircraft is as A-4C assigned to the *Black Diamonds* of VA-216, on board USS *Hancock* (CVA-19) in the Tonkin Gulf, January 1965.

Have a favorite *Skyhawk* photo? We'd like to consider it for possible publication. Send it, along with explanatory details (date, squadron, location, names of individuals, etc.) to SKYHAWK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER, 770 F Avenue, Coronado, CA 92118-2130. We'll return your photo after publication.

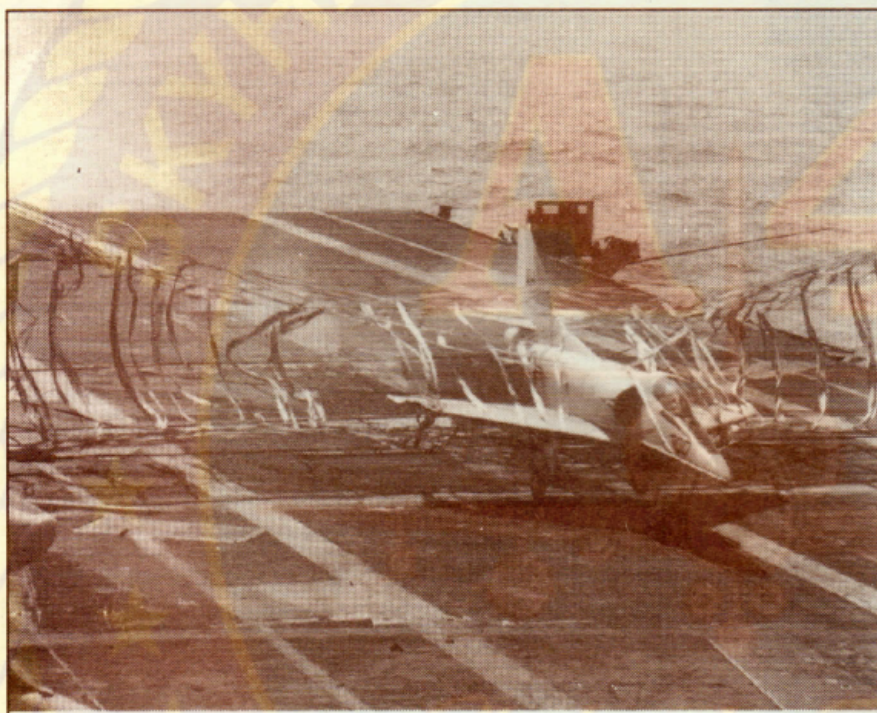


U.S. Navy photo



Our nominee as a top contender in the maximum, lump-in-throat drama category, right down to the distorted image of the plane guard destroyer refracted in the jet exhaust.

Roger, ball. Moment of truth. Ultimate test of aviating skills. Land on that "postage stamp." Bring the bird back safely so it can be used again. It's an A-4E or F. The squadron and ship are not known, but that's not really important. The photo is symbolic of all those who flew the finest little attack aircraft that mankind ever put together.



U.S. Navy photo



And, how's this for a bit of dramatic tension? During a November 1967 combat mission over North Vietnam, flying from USS *Oriskany* (CVA-34), LTJG Denny Earl of the VA-163 *Saints* took a AAA hit. Wounded in both legs and unable to use rudder or brakes, Earl was taken "in the fence" on his return to the boat.

The *Saints* made three Vietnam combat cruises in *Oriskany* as part of Air Wing 16 and, later, a fourth on board USS *Hancock* (CVA-19) assigned to Air Wing 21..

"An aircraft arresting hook is no thing of beauty. Fashioned of high-strength steel, painted in a pattern of black and white, it is cold, hard, lifeless. But, when attached to the after-end of a carrier-based aircraft, the tailhook is more than hardware. It becomes the tie that links aircraft to ocean-going ships, and is the unique emblem of the carrier aviator. By this, he is set apart from his land-based fellow aviators."

- Will Hilbrink, North American Corporation, 1959

WELCOME ABOARD!

(Skyhawk Association roster additions 1 Oct 1996 through 31 January 1997)

Eugene Armstrong	P.O. Box 28	Vaughn	WA	98394-0128
Alexander D. Bache	2 Carleton Drive	Del Rey Oaks	CA	93940
Donald W. Baggett	5100 Springfield, Suite 410	Dayton	OH	45431-1231
Robert F. Carretta	2791 Ocean Front Walk	San Diego	CA	92109
Paul A. Cassiman	12240 Ox Hill Road	Fairfax	VA	22033-2405
Steven B. Daggett	615 Del Rio Way	Fullerton	CA	92635
Richard J. Deprez	5354 Croton Court	San Diego	CA	92109-1519
James K. Engstrom	1000 E. Island Bl. #1904	Williams Island	FL	33160
Denis B. Flynn	329 Gilbert Street	Ridgewood	NJ	07450-5105
Joseph Formola	177 Irene Court	Colonia	NJ	07067-1716
Patrick J. Harwood	1843 Mill Springs Common, #207	Livermore	CA	94550
Gil Holt	2516 Rochester Court	Bedford	TX	76022
James B. Hughbanks	P. O. Box 646	Evergreen	CO	80437-0646
Robert F. Hunt	3 Wagner Street	Annapolis	MD	21401
Bruce C. Kennedy	18775 Greenwood Court	Spring Lake	MI	49456-1169
Peter A. Krueger	2139 Mt. Evans Blvd.	Pine	CO	80470
Robert J. LeGette	757 Camina Escuela	San Jose	CA	95129
Jimmie R. Little	1914 Oakwood Parkway	Union	NJ	07083
Robert S. (Jr) Lomba	2915 Willow Green Court	Roswell	GA	30076-3737
Russell N. McDowell	10681 Oak Street #60	Los Alamitos	CA	90720
Edwin L. Moir	1424 Stratfield Circle NE	Atlanta	GA	30319
Dennis Petretti	15 Cotton Road	Mahopac	NY	10541
Michael L. Richardson	6603 Connie Lane	Colleyville	TX	76034-5641
David N. Rogers	3052 Federal Hill Drive	Falls Church	VA	22044
Ron Rypel	161 S 79 Street	Milwaukee	WI	53214
Richard C. Snyder	2939 Lagoon Cove	Oviedo	FL	32765
Ronald Trepas	2727 Canary Drive	Costa Mesa	CA	92626-4747
Stephen R. Vrabel	9180 Penelope Drive	Brooksville	FL	34613
T. R. White	1007 Sunset Drive	Healdsburg	CA	95448
Chris Woodul	5529 Stone Meadow Lane	Fort Worth	TX	79179

Total members to date: 390

FIRST LIAR DEPARTMENT, Continued

Just when it looked like the identity of the pilot who made his first *Skyhawk* trap with the least number of hours in type had been established (Ernie Thabet with 48.2 hours, as reported in the Oct.'96 issue), along came Gordon "Gordo" Gray of Marathon, FL.

In the Fall of 1955, then LT Gordon Gray was doing the test pilot thing at Pax River, honking around in the A4D-1 when there weren't great bunches of Scooters to be had. (Among other things, in October 1955 Gordo set the world's closed-circuit speed record of 695+ mph while flying the second pre-production *Skyhawk*, BuNo 137814.) Gordo's log book entries show that, after doing both shore-based field catapult and arrested landing tests at Pax River, he participated in the initial carrier landing suitability tests. With a grand total of 15.2 hours of *Skyhawk* time under his belt, Gordo Gray, in A4D-1 BuNo 137822, bagged six touch and go landings and two traps on board USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) on 13 September 1955. The following day he frosted the cake with an additional trap.

SEEN ON THE READY ROOM BULLETIN BOARD

"Back in the Summer of 1962, Kent Briggs and I, a couple of majors from VMA-241, attended a two-week Reserve Command and Staff course of study at the Naval War College at Newport, RI. On Day 1 of the battle problems phase we were given air (carrier), surface, and amphibious assets and told that our mission was to protect friendly forces from two enemy battleships at two very distant locations. Alternatively, we were to select and sink the most important of the two targets and sink it. On Day 2 we selected A-4s as our weapons delivery system and 'converted' an available A-3 'photo' bird into a tanker. The aerial fueling enabled the necessary long-range flight profile and we 'sank' both battleships. On Day 3 we were informed that the A-3 tanker capability was no longer available, so we rigged a couple of other A-4s with buddy stores. We tanked the strike aircraft on their outbound leg, recycled the tankers to pick up more fuel, and launched them again to tank the returning strike aircraft. Again, both battleships were sunk.

"The powers-that-be, apparently concerned that we weren't 'playing the game' properly (i.e., were under-using the allocated surface assets, amphibious forces, etc.), took away all aerial fueling capability on Day 4. We weren't successful in sinking both battleships again on that day, but we'd proved the worth of the *Skyhawks*. And, even though we didn't play the game properly, the instructors were good sports and accepted our final course reports anyway. And, equally important, they were also good sports in allowing the two of us to nightly partake of the hospitality of the Newport O-club facilities." (Submitted by Ron Trepas, Costa Mesa, CA)

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